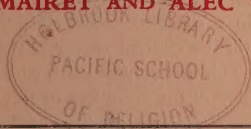


THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE

EDITED BY
PHILIP MAIRET AND ALEC VIDLER



FEBRUARY 1951
Vol. II No. 2

‘EMOTIONAL RE-ARMAMENT’

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MARRIAGE GUIDANCE

•

THE CHURCH IN
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THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE
COMMON LIFE

Vol. II. No. 2.

FEBRUARY 1951

Monthly Letter

CURRENT Christian literature about communism, including some that comes from missionary societies and notably from China, has a good deal to say about its revivalist power. Converts to communism, especially the young, embrace it with a zeal and ardour, for the works as well as the faith, that often greatly impress Christian observers. They see college students, boys and girls at school, and unlettered workers responding to the appeal of what they believe is a message of world salvation and undergoing a new, severe discipline with complete self-abandonment. Their enthusiasm is indeed a reproach to the innumerable tepid adherents of the Church of Christ, and any pain and humiliation that such information gives us are to be welcomed: we need to be alarmed and humbled. But it is also important to get this fact of communist fervour in perspective and not to be romantic about it: for it remains true that what is propagated as a messianic faith masks the bid of a minority for political domination, and only a minority within that minority consists of sacrificial zealots and idealists. George Orwell wrote—and he had some first-hand knowledge of the matter—that a revolutionary is oftener than not a social climber with a bomb in his pocket. But a Catholic evangelist who has worked among the continental proletariat has said that whole-hearted conversion to communism is sometimes, perhaps

often, a rejection of the world and a dedication of the self which, considered simply as a psychological event, corresponds closely to conversion as Christians know and think of it. This may well be true, though it needs to be examined rather than accepted at its face value.

Exaltation and Disillusionment

An act of self-dedication, which means giving up an old and accepting a new way of life (and perhaps the risk of death) is likely to arouse emotional exaltation, accompanied by a sense that good is attained and evil vanquished and that the meaning of life is revealed. It may sometimes unlock hidden reserves of personal power. Such actions always bear witness to the spiritual hunger that exists within every soul and is keenest in those most capable of the best gifts. Obviously the moral quality of any conversion depends on the purity of intention with which the new belief is grasped and appropriated; but its real value to the person and to others around him depends also upon whether the vision that is embraced is a true one. A man may be converted to an idol; and it is possible for advocates of a false doctrine to play upon the idealism and latent devotion of unattached souls and direct them to evil ends. The capacity for sacrificial enthusiasm seems to exist more abundantly in the East—and so do its perversions. A classic case, not much remembered to-day, is that of the secret anarchist Bombing Organization, a body which lived on into the first decade of this century. It was dedicated to the work of assassinating rulers of Tsarist Russia, and its most devoted instruments were youth from the Russian universities and schools, idealists converted to the belief that the world would be saved if only its rulers were terrorized into abdication. (We live at a time when it is hard to imagine how alluring and plausible the anarchists' vision was, even to some distinguished minds like Kropotkin.) These hotheads were pathetically willing to be executed or die for one another in so great a cause; but in the end it was discovered that all

this heroism had been exploited by a mysterious criminal who had become chief of the whole organization; a man who had cleverly and successfully organized several major political murders, but at the same time had been selling the lives of his own young fanatics to the Russian secret police, thus drawing large pay from both sides: nor did this exposure put a stop to the organization, for it had grown into a vested interest generously financed from America and elsewhere. This old scandal is a salutary reminder that the phenomena of conversion and devotion are in themselves no proof that the ideal to which they are a response is true. Neither, of course, is a doctrine proved false if its devotees are exploited by unscrupulous leaders. It is all the more necessary to examine the teaching itself and especially the fruits of it. There was a connection, surely, between the kinds of beliefs and aims entertained by these anarchist idealists and the sort of thing that happened to them. And there is a connection between the moral methods of communism and the reaction and disillusionment which so commonly follow (but usually too late) upon conversion to it.¹

Emotional Re-armament ?

However, enthusiasm, even if misguided and liable to recoil, is a force that can sometimes make or unmake history. It is formidable indeed to see a world-movement, openly aiming at the destruction of both our social system and our spiritual traditions, arousing ardours and energies which we seem to lack, and it is not surprising that there are efforts to whip up counter-enthusiasm. After reading more than a few published statements that demand what may be called "emotional re-armament", we want to say about this, first, that since one cannot rouse emotion in oneself, still less in others, by wishing for it, it is unwise to suggest that those who are arrayed against us have the emotional superi-

¹ A good account of such a conversion and disillusionment is given in *I Believed* by Douglas Hyde (Heinemann, 10s. 6d.).

ority. It is also unnecessary. We cannot really know that it is so, and the idea, without tapping any fresh source of enthusiasm, may only have the effect of making some feel depressed because they are accused of apathy. Some of the attempts to stir up enthusiasm against totalitarianism call upon Christianity to provide it in the form of a social vision more attractive, as though Christians were at liberty to compete with the new political ideologies in promises of a brave new world. Christians have a fundamentally different vision of human destiny, and it is not their business to engender zest for captivating illusions. Upon the purely political level, too, one cannot expect to produce in the liberal democracies a mass-appeal at all equivalent to communism, with its optimistic picture of world victory in the future. We in the West, in the recent past, have had some real experience of imposing our social system upon the rest of the world—or on a great deal of it. It has ended as a sobering, rather than an intoxicating, experience; leaving us with the costly and rather conservative task of trying to protect from disintegration such political and material values as we have established. That can be a dignified, but hardly an alluring, rôle to play—the less so as it includes, even in political terms something like a call to repentance. Even politicians have to recognize that the evils within our own society are largely the cause of what is threatening it from without.

What went wrong?

There are some good as well as bad reasons, then, why the West produces nothing to match the marching songs of totalitarian youth. Christian belief does not lend itself to sanguine Utopianism or to the hopes of inevitable progress. But Christians have always believed that good political organization and a relatively good level of social ethics are possible, have existed in the past, and are right ends to work for in the future; and they ought to be better able than they have yet shown themselves to understand and explain the tremendous social upheaval of communism. Why did a

movement founded on a preaching that appealed to social justice and the duty of relieving human misery—for in this respect the atheist Marx was at one with the prophets of his ancestral line—why did this produce in so short a time a type of government, of which close and not prejudiced observers say they doubt whether the authorities are at all concerned (save in individual cases) for the welfare of the people, or for the sacrifice of human life and freedom required to reach their goals? How much had the atheism of that impassioned preaching to do with its ultimate outcome? We know that between Christian faith and a good social and political life the relation is not simple or direct. The best rulers in history have often been far from good men, and governments of devout Christians have governed very badly. Nevertheless, since we are all convinced that there is a relation, we should be better able to show what it is. Unless we can do so the Church will not be able to produce that clearer social witness which is now admitted on all hands to be urgent; and its reaction to the communist revolution, whether indignant or complaisant, will be of little real effect.

A Demand for Definition

A number of Christians seem to think they have done their duty towards the problem (writes a correspondent of ours) when they have said, in all sincerity, that “there is surely much good in communism” and that we (or the Americans or both) “are as bad as the Russians”. Evidence can be shown, of course, that seems to support these propositions; yet it is useless to advance them as if they constituted a final Christian standpoint on the matter, and as though further scrutiny or qualification were unnecessary or unchristianly provocative. It is worse than useless, because communism undeniably challenges our faith upon both practical and doctrinal grounds; and against an antagonistic movement as clear-headed, resolute and well-organized as communism, any muddled or undecided defence is bound to crumble

away. It is therefore a duty, not indeed incumbent on all Christians, but upon all those who are able and available, to define as clearly as possible where and how the two views of society conflict. A missionary who has had long and intimate experience of the spreading of communism in China asks how we are to cope with the fact that millions of Chinese, including many Christians, believe the communist picture, analysis and programme to be essentially true.¹ We cannot, he says, be neutral on this issue, for the lives and welfare of millions are involved ; and response is important for the Church's soul, since this matter concerns not its institutional life but its concern for others. It seems that in China—and this would apply elsewhere and nearer home—the Christian student has been, and is, provided with no adequate alternative teaching about the facts of economic life. He either falls for the only highly developed explanation of the economic revolution presented to him, or finds himself without power to criticize it.

The Need for Christian Social Doctrine

What he needs, says this observer, is the authentic Christian picture of man's economic situation, from which the Christian exposed to communist influences can answer such practical questions as the following—(1) What are the basic economic needs of a society ? (2) Is his country in a condition where ruthless total planning is the only way to economic health, and if so, how far is a government justified in sacrificing the welfare of individuals to its schemes for the general good ? (3) What is the will of God for the use of property and its ownership and control ; what kind of land reform, for instance, is just ; how far is centralization of collective farms, industries and co-operatives justifiable ; and how far should private individuals be allowed to hold property in independence of the state ?

¹ We are indebted to the World Council of Churches documentations service for the valuable report which is quoted here and in later paragraphs.

(4) What have Christians to say, apart from their concern for the future of their own church institutions, about the elimination of all centres of economic power which are independent of the state : can the Church sanction a society in which no economic basis is left for any institution or movement which opposes the government ? These practical questions cannot be avoided, for to avoid them is really to give Christian sanction to the communist answers. Even when a Christian can do nothing to alter the course of economic events, he should be understanding them clearly as a Christian and not as a communist—nor of course merely as a reactionary. If Christ is Lord of history, the time will come for his servants to act. We have reproduced, almost word for word, what the missionary writes, because it shows a need that is actually experienced under revolutionary conditions. And if Christians cannot produce a competitive design for welfare states, they ought to be able to formulate social principles which are as persuasive as historical dialectics and economic determinism, and of more abiding importance.

The Need for Criticism

This presentation of Christian social doctrine is partly a critical work. We do not make our faith understood unless we indicate no less vividly what it makes us disbelieve. "If you want to be clear as to what you are asserting, be clear as to what you are denying", was the advice of one of the best English philosophers of this century, and it applies also to affirmations of religious or social truth. "Without systematic and painstaking analysis of false views to discover where they are false, there is no reaching any truth whatever." It applies, with a difference, where Christians find themselves in strife with communism, for that doctrine can only be criticized effectively if we take the trouble to know just what is true in it, or what seems true to those who accept it, and separate its truth from what is demonstrably untrue. It would be a good thing if many more Christians

had a thorough grounding in the Marxian theory than the few who at present could pass any examination in it. It would sharpen their insight into many other things besides the external peril of militant Kremlinism. For the truth is that if we are fully to affirm our faith in Christ, what we have clearly to disbelieve and reject is much more than the fallacies and contradictions in communism. Nor will that heresy be exorcized until the Christian position is firmly defined against many less conscious trends in our own societies which are leading men, by scarcely perceptible steps, towards conscious and fatalistic materialism.

The Living Witness

Social doctrine is necessary, so is criticism and self-criticism, yet these are only incidental ; for the one decisive power of the truth is in the living witness to it. The power of that witness over the indoctrinated communist is that it contradicts the economic determinism which is the primary dogma of his credo. The writer we have already quoted says :

It has, I think, been demonstrated in China that positive practical witness along lines firmly believed to be God's will in the field of economics, education or wherever the Christian is called to serve, has been the most effective. This involves, first, losing all concern for the survival of the Church as an institution. This is the first witness which the communists cannot understand and which makes an indelible impression. The Church is laid in the foundation of Jesus Christ, and for this very reason Christians are free from anxiety about their worldly organization, to act as God commands. The Christian community cannot be destroyed by blows from the state. The communists' recognition of this, to them, uncanny fact, is enshrined in their constitutions in most countries, and their recent attempts to use and domesticate the Church within their social order.

Freedom from Fear

If the Chinese churchman can renounce his institutions in face of more humanly urgent demands, it is because he has confidence that the essence of the institution is not the

buildings, organization or endowments that have to be sacrificed. It is something that will endure, a life that the Christian has from his new master and therefore cannot lose. He, or his younger brethren, at some later time will make a different sacrifice to restore what material means may be needed and possible. He is free from fear. A German pastor, after a long experience in Russian prisoner-of-war camps,¹ writes of what he calls "total fear; the fear that life may become totally intolerable, which is the source and fount of all lesser fears". He says that modern man, apart from Christ, "can only pretend that he is not afraid, through a superficial attitude of self-illusion, or through a distorted optimism, but he cannot escape from fear". "We are free from fear only in so far as we are freed again and again by our Master". That is one answer to the question developed earlier in this letter, for it applies also to false hopes and exaltations, at a time when, as T. S. Eliot wrote eleven years ago, "You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy, in order to arrive at what you do not know".

INTERIM

Broadcasting

Most of our readers have probably heard something of the remarkable popularity of the B.B.C.'s religious broadcasting, with its millions of listeners, most of whom have no church affiliation. For a more precise knowledge of this, and a well-reasoned estimate of its effects and value, we would recommend *Christianity and Broadcasting*, the report of a Commission appointed by the British Council of Churches and recently published by the S.C.M. Press (2s. 6d.). It views the questions of religious broadcasting in relation to the whole cultural responsibility of the Corporation, and it starts from a recognition of the fact that the public as a whole is suffering, in the present period,

¹ Helmut Gollwitzer of Dahlem, now Professor at Bonn, in a lecture on *The Christian between East and West*, circulated by the W.C.C. Study Department.

from a poverty of genuine and deeply-held convictions, not only religious but of any kind—"the present all-round decline in serious listening is undeniable". If the B.B.C. is to fulfil the responsibility for public education laid on it by its charter, and is to interpret this job realistically in the actual cultural setting, it is bound to work for the "rehabilitation of convictions" in the populace. This, in the opinion of the Commissioners, means giving more scope for controversial debate over the air, which, in spite of its upsetting effect upon sections of the public and of other difficulties, they feel no doubt ought to be undertaken.

Though the Report considers with due satisfaction the fact that religious broadcasts serve to keep at least the main ideas and imagery of the Faith before the minds of millions (nine million listen to the "Sunday Half-hour") it is very careful not to over-estimate the real religious value of having radio services "laid on" like gas and water. Their reception by masses who have no commitment to or participation in any Christian community is compared to a sandbag wall against the encroaching tide of heathen ideologies—valuable only if regarded as a "holding operation" whilst more positive measures are being taken both by the radio and by other agencies. The report contains a number of concrete proposals, which look promising. This is a good introduction from a special angle, to the general responsibilities presented by this revolutionary social instrument. It can be recommended for careful study as a preparation for the bulky Report since made available by Lord Beveridge's Parliamentary Committee.

School Worship

When the 1944 Education Act was passed, there was much difference of opinion about the probable outcome of the provision for an opening act of worship in the State Schools. Some hailed it as a great advance towards the rechristianization of England; others forecast that it would be generally treated as a mere formality and so would do more harm than good. No one could be sure at the time what would come of it: but a survey has recently been made of the way in which the opening act of worship is conducted at all the non-denominational schools in the county of Nottinghamshire (about 240 in number). A visitor from outside has been able to be present at a service held in each of these schools, in some cases more than once. The result has been to show that the intention of the 1944 Act is being faithfully

carried out with a great deal of imagination and enterprise. While usually the head teacher takes the leading part, the other teachers with rare exceptions attend and in some schools share in the conduct of the worship. Moreover, the children themselves are encouraged to participate actively, and sometimes are entirely responsible for the preparation and conduct of services. In large schools separate acts of worship may be arranged for different age groups, though the physical conditions in many schools at present handicap this and other desirable developments. A large number of schools make use of the service for schools that is broadcast weekly by the B.C.C. ; many head teachers carefully prepare for it and so enable the children to take an active part. A drawback here however is that the broadcast service is not equally suited to the older and younger children. A report on the whole subject which has been presented to the Education Committee of the Nottinghamshire County Council emphasizes the reverence and spontaneity which were found to characterize school worship throughout the county, and should put a stop to ill-informed and adverse generalizations about the way in which this provision of the Act is working out.

Loss and Gain

We are sorry that *Christendom* has had to cease publication. For twenty years this "Journal of Christian Sociology" has maintained a high standard of commentary on social affairs, not least in its editorials, which have been marked by both courage and independence. There is too little Christian writing of this kind. The contributors to *Christendom*, who formed a rather closely-knit group, have developed the implications of their distinctive point of view more thoroughly than any other group or school of Christian social thinkers in England, and even those who have most dissented from *Christendom's* presuppositions or conclusions will deplore its disappearance. The vacant place is not however to be left empty. It is announced that a new quarterly review, entitled *Faith and Society* will shortly make its appearance, to be edited by Dr. J. V. Langmead Casserley, who was a contributor to *Christendom* from its earliest years.

* * * * *

University is another new periodical which will be welcomed by readers of *The Frontier* who move in the academic world. This is to

be published three times a year (Blackwell, 4s. per annum; 1s. 6d. single copies), and is designed to provide for communication on an open platform between graduates and undergraduates of different universities on theological, philosophical, political and literary subjects. The first number, which has already appeared, is as stimulating as it is varied in its contents.

Frontier Luncheons

The Committee charged with making arrangements for the Frontier Luncheons in London welcomes advice and comment and has had a good deal of it. A question now under consideration is whether the charge for tickets cannot be reduced below the present 5s., which would mean holding the luncheons elsewhere. Everyone agrees that the advantages provided by the Royal Empire Society could not be bettered, but it is impossible for them to lower the charges, and thus far 5s. tickets have not quite covered the total costs. In favour of continuing at the Royal Empire Society, it may be pointed out that a reduction from 5s. to 3s. 6d. would represent a saving of only 1s. 6d. every two months to those who regularly attended. However, there are some good reasons in favour of a more popular price, and the Committee may decide to experiment with a different arrangement later in the year.

For Readers—and their Friends

Upon reflection, most of our readers would probably be able to think of one or more friends who would be likely to take *The Frontier* regularly if they knew it. Inset in this number is a postcard form, postpaid, addressed to the publisher; and this has only to be filled in with the name, or names, and addresses to which you wish a presentation copy of this *Frontier* sent, stating whether your recommendation is to be personal or anonymous, and the publisher will do the rest. May we urge as many as possibly can to avail themselves of this?

MARRIAGE GUIDANCE

IT is surprising, when we come to think of it, that there is so little evidence in Christian history of serious efforts to guide and educate married couples. It is true that at the outset, as any student of St. Paul knows, marriage was regarded as the lesser of two evils, or at the best a matter of indifference, since the imminence of the second Coming put all earthly conditions in the shade. And this attitude to the married state lingered on for some time after the hopes of a swift return of Christ in judgment had faded away. So the paradoxical situation came about that those two fundamentally Christian institutions, monogamous marriage and family harmony, were regarded as hindrances by those who sought to follow the Way in complete and ascetic celibacy. And though ideas have broadened and softened in recent centuries it is still true that marriage, for all its possibilities for righteousness, has seemed to many of the finest and most saintly figures in the Church either too delightful or too dangerous (perhaps both !) for them to seek to experience it.

There is of course much to be advanced on the other side ; and it would be manifestly unfair to deny that the Churches in England have not only stedfastly upheld the ideal of Christian marriage but have also provided countless examples of the enrichment of Christian experience which husband and wife can attain through their common life together. But there has throughout been too little recognition both of the importance, to Church, individual and nation, of really happy marriage, and also of the qualities commonly needed to secure that happiness.

The reluctance of both State and Church to interfere, except by setting up high standards and denouncing those who failed to attain them, has continued into the present century, and is not yet entirely overcome. There were several reasons for this, some good, some less good ; and it may be worth while considering them in some detail.

In the first place, one of the most significant elements in marriage is its privacy. Not only is it a contract between two private individuals as such, but the fulfilment of that contract, on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels, takes place behind closed doors ; interference, advice, conjecture even—these are unwarrantable intrusions upon that territory which is still marked “ Private ” in a world more publicly over-run every generation. And it is right that this should be so. For marriage is more than a human contract, it is a divine mystery. If husband and wife do not literally become “ one flesh ”, there is yet something created which is more than the adding of one individual to another, an awareness of one another and through each other of heights and depths which neither could have plumbed in isolation. This experience is something which cannot be conveyed to those who have not enjoyed it; and it is acknowledged to be so precious that there is a very natural hesitation to prescribe rules for its attainment or cures for its distemper. Common politeness decrees that where there is no evidence to the contrary a married couple *are* “ happy ever after ”, and shame on any who ventures either to explore or question that happiness.

Secondly, there is no doubt that a majority of married couples to-day (and probably a larger majority in the time of our great-grandfathers) really are as happy, whether by divine grace or by innate qualities, as anyone could wish. There is something, presumably, in the hidden affinity which draws two people together, something more in the compelling power of love given and received ; and something too, as the marriage matures, in shared memories and the ties of a family. These elements all go to produce that deep content which is breathed in with the atmosphere of a happy home. No need for interference there.

Thirdly, where the failure of a marriage has been so evident that none can ignore it, it can often be plausibly (and often rightly) declared that the failure was not due to any shortcoming in the theory or practice of the married

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Church Times

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The Uncurtained Throne

Mr. Warner Allen's three books, *The Timeless Moment*, *The Happy Issue*, and now *The Uncurtained Throne* form a kind of trilogical testament; although each is complete in itself. He has started from experience that came to him unsought, and has always tried to find his own explanation, consulting the works of the mystics only to verify or to correct his own conclusions. He finds in Dr. Rhine's experiments in extra-sensory perception minor evidence of a Power in the universe that attains its fullest revelation in the spiritual experience.

12/6

The Happy Issue

'This book, like its predecessor *The Timeless Moment*, springs from an experience which came to Mr. Warner Allen at the age of fifty as he was listening to a performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, an experience of being absorbed for a split second in pure creative light without ceasing to be himself No one reading Mr. Allen's book can doubt that he received a flash of absolute reality . . . he has bridged with radiant logic the gulf that too often yawns in both pseudo-mystic and moralist between the realms of certitude and humility, of the divine and the mortal.'

—*Listener*.

12/6

The Timeless Moment

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state, but to causes quite outside the couple's control. No one who has studied the daily life of the villager or factory hand of 150 years ago can wonder at the fatal effect such grinding poverty had upon family life. Indeed there were, till quite recently, far too many husbands and wives whose love for each other had to withstand all that slum conditions and financial insecurity could do to overcome it. And in the altered but in some ways still more testing circumstances of to-day there are many people who feel that the first essential condition for restoring married happiness is to build far more and much better houses ; and they are not altogether wrong.

But there was a fourth, and less commendable, cause for the policy of *laissez faire*. Though the Church had, as we have mentioned, never wavered from its insistence on the ideals of monogamy and loyalty, it had shut its eyes to conventions and assumptions which were as grave a breach of the spirit of the law as bigamy or divorce were of the letter. No marriage can be truly happy which is not a real partnership, and no partnership is sound unless both parties to it observe the same standards of fidelity. Yet it became notorious that husbands were everywhere assuming—and being allowed to assume—freedoms which they would never grant to their wives. As often as not a married woman accepted her own subordinate position and her partner's extra-marital " adventures " as part of what marriage meant for the wife ; all that mattered was that the façade of happiness should be unbroken. We are rightly horrified at the number of divorces to-day. But the miseries and cruelties which festered inside so many homes when divorce meant social and political disaster were none the more blessed for being concealed from view. If the Church had done more to train and inspire those who married to make their life together a positive growth in spiritual and emotional happiness, instead of resting content with abstract ideals and ready denunciation, we might be in far better shape to-day.

However, as so often, men have been forced after centuries of neglect to seek a cure for an evil which they might have prevented. Two wars have lately contributed their evil influence, but have only accelerated a tendency which was already at work. The loosening of moral controls, the discrediting of accepted values, the slipping standards in common decency, all these revealed how insecure all the time were the foundations upon which Christian marriage had come to be built, and how little those who came to the altar or the Registry Office realized what they were about. It was natural—and as I have suggested above it was probably right—that there should be an increase in the number of divorces. But it is staggering to realize that the divorces in 1947 were ten times as many as in 1938, fifty times as many as in 1918, and one hundred times as many as in 1900. This takes no account of separation, judicial or otherwise, nor of unhappy marriages still somehow holding together, nor of those homes whence every trace of affection and graciousness have long vanished. And out of these broken and unhappy homes came and still come that army of juvenile delinquents—the cynical, the smart-alks, the “couldn’t-care-less”, the brutal, the insensitive, the vindictive—all those who puzzle the reformer of to-day, and of whom some will be fathers and mothers of the Britons of tomorrow.

One thing seemed clear to those who, between the two wars, began to give serious thought to this long-neglected problem. It was no longer any use pretending that men and women who entered upon marriage with no real understanding of its problems and opportunities could be relied upon to build a happy home together without guidance or to overcome their difficulties and disagreements without help and advice. So it was that, in 1938, the Marriage Guidance Council was born. For some years it was little more than a group of enthusiasts, led by that prince of men, Dr. Herbert Gray. Then in 1942 it took palpable form as a society, with Lord Horder and the present Archbishop of Canterbury as its first Presidents. The next year its inde-

fatigable General Secretary, Dr. David Mace, opened the first marriage guidance centre in London. From that moment the whole movement spread like a river in spate, and four years later there were 100 local Councils up and down the country. These united to form the National Marriage Guidance Council, under whose auspices the work has continued ever since.

This rapid growth was in part due to the universal recognition that an urgent need was being met for the first time in the right way. But it also owes much to the support given to it by the reports of the Denning Committee in 1946 and the Harris Committee in 1948. As a result of the latter the Council now receives an annual grant from the Exchequer—a grant which at first seemed munificent but which is already proving inadequate to finance even half the work the Council tries to do. But though in receipt of public money the Council is, and always will be, an independent body, still relying very largely upon individual subscriptions and almost entirely upon voluntary workers. Its whole character would be changed for the worse if this were not so.

There are ten fundamental principles which the National Council has laid down for the guidance of local Councils throughout the country. These "ten points" set out clearly and forcibly the importance to any community of monogamy, fidelity and parenthood, and stress the contribution made to the national welfare by secure and well brought up families. It has been objected by many Christians that they should do more than this; and that somewhere in this document there should be a reference to the divine institution of marriage, and the spiritual foundations on which alone it can be safely built. This is certainly at first sight a surprising omission, and may give rise to the uneasy suspicion that, though the Council has succeeded in securing State money without surrendering to State domination, it is already deeply infected with a secularism which is more dangerous still. This is a point of such primary

importance to Christians who have a natural sympathy with the Council's aims that it must be answered.

To anyone with inside knowledge of the Council's work it is a fact that no set answer seems necessary. All the leaders of the movement, and all those who do most of the work are (without, I believe, a single exception) devout and practising Christians. A high proportion of its Executive Committee are in Orders ; and wherever there is work to be done or decisions to be made the meeting is opened with prayer. Why then this strange avoidance of religious assertion in the Council's "Principles"? There are, I understand, two main reasons.

In the first place, there was a natural inclination, when the Council was in process of construction, to make it a specifically Christian body or even a body limited to a certain branch of the Church. But it was soon realized that if it were—at that stage—to fly any "party" colours at all it would probably be confronted, both locally and nationally, with a rival secular body, claiming to do the same work in a wider field. So, rightly or wrongly, the founders decided to sacrifice the appearance to save the reality, and this essentially Christian work went ahead without any open reference to the inspiration behind it. The second reason is much of the same kind. The work the Council is now doing reaches every section of the community (with the sole exception of the Roman Catholic Church, which works independently but on parallel lines). Those who seek its help belong to every class and every creed. It can be plausibly argued that many of those who now come for help might fight shy of a definitely Christian organization ; further, that it is just these people who have most to gain and most to learn from the genuinely Christian counsel they will receive.

These reasons may or may not convince Christians who feel unhappy about the secular wording of the "Principles". But there is no doubt about the Christian spirit in which the principles are interpreted in action. Moreover, they are

now so firmly established, and were given such emphasis when recognition and financial help were sought and obtained from the Government, that it would be far from easy to make a change.

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It remains to explain briefly what the Council does, and how it does it. At first the main object of the founders was to mend threatened marriages before they were irreparably broken. But this "ambulance work", though still a feature of the programme of every local Council, is now regarded as less important than the work of education, whether of the newly married, of the engaged, or of young people generally. Though there is no separate organization for these various branches of the work it will be as well, later on, to consider them one by one.

In all branches the efficiency of the work done depends almost entirely upon the "counsellor" or "counsellors" (ideally there should be at least one of each sex). Except in a very few cases counsellors are unpaid; but they are not by their voluntary status spared a rigorous system of selection and training. They are first recommended by their local Council, and then subjected to a two-day "house party", which is very far from being a mere formality. When they are provisionally approved, they have to complete a training course of forty-eight lectures, extending over six to nine months, and including written work. They are then regarded as sufficiently qualified to start active counselling; but even then they must serve a year of probation before being finally approved. It is doubtful whether any other body of volunteers has to submit to so determined a scrutiny, and it is a fine tribute both to the evident value of the work and to the public spirit of the nation that the number of applicants considerably exceeds those who can be accommodated at the various training centres. But it is of such fundamental importance that this type of work should not only be done but be done really well that the

National Council has always set its face against any relaxation of the procedure ; in this attitude they are supported by the Government, which has set up a special board to supervise the training given.

Not even the best counsellor can be omniscient, and many of the problems which arise call for advice or treatment which only a specialist can give. So behind the counsellors at each local centre there are panels of "consultants" of five kinds, medical, psychological, social, legal and spiritual. A trained counsellor soon learns when to deal with a case and when to pass it on to a consultant (who also gives his services without remuneration).

Behind this first and second line of operations each centre has its normal complement of chairman, secretary and committee, linked more or less closely with national headquarters. Regular conferences and courses ensure that the activities of local branches conform to a fairly general pattern.

The titles and function of the counsellor and consultants make it clear that at first the emphasis was almost exclusively upon what I have called ambulance work. It has always been a guiding principle that the first approach must be made to and not by the council, and those who in ever growing numbers used this opportunity came primarily in the hope of getting sympathetic and practical advice. Hence the chief executive officer in each branch had to be experienced and understanding, and a safe repository for confidences. This is still of first importance. All interviews are private, all records kept locked away and eventually destroyed. Every conceivable type of difficulty is encountered, and every section of the community represented among those who come to have them resolved.

It is now clear how essential it is that counsellors should be not only of a right disposition but trained to a high point of efficiency. Amateur if well-intentioned fumbling by those sought out (often after agonies of doubt and apprehension) to give advice on intimate problems would

have killed the movement almost before it got going. As it is, the steadily growing demand for help and the measure of successful treatment possible when the trouble has not already gone too far are sufficient testimony to the quality of the work done.

But better even than tackling difficulties before they have become too serious is anticipating them and so avoiding them altogether. When evidence came in from centres all over the country that a very large proportion of the problems encountered need never have existed had either wife or husband or both known, when they married, what they were about, there came into being an educational programme which now absorbs the greater part of the Council's activities. "Marriage preparation" of some kind is being more widely recognized as a natural stage in the progress of the engaged couple, though as yet it is still far too often disregarded. It can take any one of many forms, from a single interview with a counsellor to medical examination, teaching on marriage technique, and courses in parentcraft and home-making. At some centres several couples come together to a series of talks and discussions, often followed by more private interviews. Methods naturally vary to suit the needs of individuals. The important thing is that those about to be married should realize that there is an art of marriage which it is not always easy to master without instruction, and should not be too proud or too diffident to ask for help. That the help given is of value is shown not only by the gratitude of those who receive it but by their happiness once they are man and wife.

But the educational work is not limited to those already engaged, and Marriage Guidance Councils earned special commendation in the Population Report for the part they were playing in organizing lectures, courses of instruction, group discussions, etc., for young people all over the country. So much unhappiness, in this field as in others, is due either to sheer ignorance or to "knowing things wrong" that the need and value of this work for those of (roughly) the

16 to 23 age group are sufficiently obvious. It is in work of this kind, in which all sensible and experienced speakers who approve of the Council's aims and principles can co-operate, that the seed is sown in soil not yet trodden down, poisoned with rank growths or choked with worldliness.

This is of course only the briefest summary of what the Council tries to do ; it sounds ordinary and obvious enough, yet if it could be expanded and illustrated from the case-book of even a single counsellor in a large centre it would catch the imagination of the most insensitive and persuade the most sceptical. Admittedly the work done is a scratching of the surface ; yet it is but twelve years old. If the Council receives the support that is its due there is no telling what influence it may have upon our national life in fifty or a hundred years' time. Above all, it is doing a Christian work, striving to bring back into our homes that sacredness and dignity which should adorn all married life, and to enlighten and strengthen those who at a supreme moment in their lives vowed that they would live together in love.

HUGH LYON.

Any further information about the National Marriage Guidance Council and its work can be obtained from the General Secretary, 68 Duke Street, London, W. 1.

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THE CHURCH IN THE ARMY

HAVE we any right to expect a Christian army, even if it is allowed that the phrase itself has some meaning? Is it fair to throw the weight of Army authority behind a faith which is only held with any real sincerity by a minority in our country? Is the rôle of the Church in the Army, as in the University, to be a "creative" rather than a "dominant" minority? Questions such as these must often arise in the mind of an Army Chaplain, and in the mind of any Christian, inside or outside the Army, concerned with the presentation of the Christian faith to the young people who willy-nilly find themselves in uniform, and to their fellows, the professional soldiers, in the Army to-day. It is certainly true that the Church is strategically placed in the Army. Chaplains are appointed to the Army on the basis of one per thousand troops. "Religion", so to speak, is on the Army "establishment". For better or for worse, the new recruit finds himself confronted not only by the Sergeant-Major and the P.T. Instructor, the C.O., and the M.O., but by the Padre as well. For both Padre and recruit this may well be a shaking experience.

Where we would fain speak of the Church, we must speak of the Churches. Chaplains of the Roman Communion have their own organization within the Army and operate as a separate entity. Chaplains of the Church of England, Church of Scotland and other Presbyterian Communions, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist Churches, in some measure work together within what is called "The Unified Department". It is with the opportunities and responsibilities of this "Unified Department" that the present article is concerned. The main opportunity hardly needs stressing. Because of conscription, the average young man to-day finds himself in the Army. Because "Religion" is on the Army establishment, he finds the Church there too. What does he do about it? What is the Church doing about it?

Changes and Opportunities

One obvious change in the Army scene strikes the observer. The Church Parade, for better or for worse, is no more. It is true that the Army may still parade to church on occasions of national importance, but the Church Parade, as a regularly and frequently recurring part of the soldier's life, has gone. "Religion", however, remains on the Army establishment. Moreover, the Army, in the persons of its senior commanders, almost without exception, is glad that this is so. It is impossible for a Chaplain to work along with "top level" soldiers to-day without being deeply impressed by their desire to strengthen the impact of the Christian Church upon the lives of their men and to identify themselves clearly with the Church's witness. The Church has not only a legal status within the Army; it has the Army's very sincere good-will. This happy relationship and its own status within the organization of the Army have strengthened the Church in the normal functions of its ministry and have opened the way for experiments in Christian Evangelism to which contemporary civilian life has been much less hospitable. In the main these experiments have taken, in recent years, two forms.

The range and significance of the extension of adult education associated with the opening years of the last war have often been remarked. When war came upon us it was found that the men and women concerned required a "general" and "liberal", as well as a "technical" preparation for Service life. This led to the experimental and now well honoured methods of the Royal Army Education Corps in their "Army Bureau of Current Affairs" and "British Way and Purpose" groups. A not dissimilar course was followed in the work of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department (R.A.Ch.D.) during the war years. The main features of the Padre's Hour, as they have developed over the past ten years, are well known. The period is normally within working hours. Attendance is compulsory except in the case of those who elect to undertake some other

duty—not, it should be said, chosen for them by the Army because of its particularly distasteful nature. The Group may be very small or may reach into three figures. Instruction may be given on a denominational basis, the men being split up into denominational groups, or else, and this is more frequent, a mixture of denominations, and those of no real denominational allegiance whatsoever are found in the groups. In Army Basic Training Units (A.B.T.U.) soldiers commonly receive one period of religious instruction each week. After posting to their particular units, the period is likely to occur with less regularity and frequency, to which state of affairs the short supply of Chaplains and “the exigencies of the service” both contribute. It follows that while in the various forms of A.B.T.U.s consecutive teaching is possible, this becomes increasingly impossible in the wider field to which soldiers, after training, are posted.

The Present Period

Comparisons between the war-time Padre's Hour and the present are inevitable. During the war, the Padre talked with his men, and they with him, on a more or less common level of age and experience, to which the war itself provided the background. There was all the give and take of good adult education. It is very different to-day, with no such obvious fight for survival to unite Padre and men, and with the Army consisting largely of very young men who would gladly be elsewhere. In many ways the period is a more difficult one for the Padre now.

Chaplains re-act to this situation in many different ways. Some feel, and say quite frankly, that this kind of work is “not their line”. In some cases, they may well be right. The teaching ministry is not for every man in Holy Orders, and teaching of this kind is not easy. Others again regard the men or women in front of them almost as the verger might regard a group assembled at the church door for some ceremony. When the doors are opened they will come in.

It is the duty of us all, they would say, to be confirmed if we have been baptized, and baptized if that has not already taken place. For some in the group, this direct approach has its value, and it is often found that the group will immediately provide candidates for the Confirmation Class, and some members, at least, to share in full the work and worship of the local congregation. Sometimes Chaplains go further and regard the group, when it is assembled on a denominational basis, as to all intents and purposes a Confirmation Class, and follow the scheme of instruction which, in their Communion, such a class dictates.

Educational Policy

So far as the R.A.Ch.D. has evolved a considered policy in this matter, a rather different approach has been suggested. It counsels a frank facing of the fact that most of the members of the group, whatever may be written on their Pay Book, are some considerable distance from the point at which they may usefully come forward for baptism or confirmation. On this view the group should be seen, not as assembled as a matter of course outside the Church door, but as passing, in the case of most of its members, along a path which at that precise moment has landed them near the Church, but which in point of fact does not itself lead within the precincts but leads past and beyond them. It just happens that these young people are in the Army and that the Army has ordained this period of instruction for them. The point is that nothing more *need* happen: they may very well, and the likelihood is that they will, continue on their way unless they are somehow arrested in their tracks and enabled to look with real interest in the direction of the church to which they have come, physically, so near. It is to arrest and to interest that the tentative schemes of instruction submitted to the Chaplains' Department in the last three years have been directed. They are designed to claim a hearing for the Christian Faith and to make this claim through the language and the interests of the hearers.

On this view, the Padre's Hour is better likened to a soap box at Hyde Park Corner than a Confirmation Class. Both analogies are imperfect, but the former at least comes nearer to the truth.

Army "Church Houses"

Whatever policy, conscious or unconscious, Chaplains may follow, it will be agreed by all that the difficulties in taking it are at least as great as the opportunity itself. Apart from the training period, Chaplains rarely see the same group of men twice. Fifty or forty minutes sandwiched into a day's training, often in surroundings that are the opposite of inspiring, the atmosphere of the "square" or technical training so often brought in with the men, all these add to the Chaplain's own private problems concerned with the presentation of the subject. By common consent, the Church House provides that hospitable setting for the Christian Evangel which the Padre's Hour, in the nature of the case, so often fails to do.

During the war "Moral Leadership Courses" were run by the R.A.F. in Italy and elsewhere, and it was in Italy—appropriately enough in Assisi—that the Army opened its first Church House. Like the Padre's Hour, it appears that the Church House has come to stay. To-day there is at least one Church House in every overseas Command, and, in the case of Germany and the Middle East, more than one. In Great Britain, the R.A.Ch.D. Training Centre and Depot at Bagshot Park serves as the Church House for all Home Commands; this rôle being undertaken in addition to the work specially concerned with the needs and training of Chaplains. The writer has served on the staff of Bagshot Park for the last three years and is only qualified to speak at first-hand of the work there. The general pattern followed in the Church House abroad is not so very different.

Some Methods used

The aim of the Christian Information and Leadership Courses undertaken in Bagshot Park is perfectly plain: it

is to preach the Gospel, through lecture, film, discussion, Bible study, and, certainly not least, through the fellowship of Christian life and worship as this may be experienced by the students on the Course. Lecture and discussion have their part to play; the screen is found to be particularly persuasive; books, when adequately introduced, are eagerly bought or borrowed; Bible study particularly is found interesting and thrilling by the many for whom the Bible was a closed, because an assumed "unreadable" book: but it is the cumulative effect of all these agencies within the setting of the Christian Community which is really effective in moving the hearts and minds of those who come. And there is no doubt, humanly speaking, that such a moving takes place in at least some cases.

Bagshot Park has dealt in the last three years with a complete cross-section of the Army. Courses have been held for "Other Ranks" in which the National Serviceman is, of course, in the majority; for Other Ranks in what is now the W.R.A.C.; and for officers in the junior and in the more senior ranks. Courses have also been held for the "Top Level" Commanders. These Courses have lasted usually for five days, and students have been drawn from all the main Protestant denominations. Similar Courses have been conducted in Church Houses abroad. On the whole, students overseas have been more commonly "directed" to attend the Courses. At home, with the exception of some Officers' Courses, students have come usually from their own choice.

Factors of Promise

On those concerned with the planning and conduct of these Courses, they have an heartening effect. Of course only a small fraction of the Army can profit by them: so far as numbers are concerned, Bagshot Park is making a token contribution; although in Germany the statistical record is more impressive. It must be remembered, too, in the case of Bagshot Park, that those who come are, in

the main, at least interested enough to put down their names for the Course. However, when due allowance is made for those favourable factors it remains true that there is considerable room for encouragement. Generalizations about the state of youth and the state of religion in the country are notoriously dangerous, but a few of the more hopeful kind may balance the usual run of gloomy comment.

In the view of the present writer, young people to-day are open to the Gospel in a way which was not true ten or fifteen years ago. The Debunking Thirties seem a long way behind. The smug complacency, the self-assurance, the expanding optimism of a scientific humanism, are all conspicuous by their absence now. A good many of the gods in the humanist's temple lie shattered, and there is a widespread concern for what is to take their place. "*Angst*" is by no means the prerogative of the student to-day. It characterizes in greater or lesser degree the thinking and the outlook of the whole younger generation. There is a fundamental insecurity which reveals itself in such features of Army life as the pathetic eagerness of many a youngster to be home each week-end in default of being at home all the time. On the whole the national serviceman seems young for his years, less sophisticated, less "set" in thought and habit than the comparable age group before the war. All this is hardly surprising in light of his background, but its relevance for our enquiry is clear. In a real sense his insecurity is our opportunity, if God will enable us to take it.

Two other features may be noted. The ignorance of the Christian faith so often remarked in this generation is at times almost an advantage. "How can a man become a Christian when he already is one?" The question, posed by Sir Walter Moberly in his "*The Crisis in the University*", is equally relevant here. Just because the territory of the Christian faith is so unknown, exploration may appear more attractive, more exciting. The youngsters facing the Chaplain in the Padre's Hour, or the Church House Class

to-day, are very little "inoculated" against the Christian infection. For many of them a conducted tour of the Church building is a novel experience, and the "good news" of the Gospel is at least "news".

Another hopeful characteristic has been brought vividly before us by a recent article in *Picture Post*. The article featured "The Sunday School". Its appearance alone is significant. No less significant is the article's theme. Sunday School teaching may be the hobby of the few, but it is discussed among young people to-day with as much unselfconsciousness and as little embarrassment as the cultivation of any other interest. Personal observations in the last few years bear out the truth of this contention. Young people to-day are less diffident in discussing religious issues, and less inhibited in identifying themselves with the Christian cause if conviction impels them in that direction.

A Point of Danger

It would perhaps be convenient to claim that if the Church does not bestir itself the gap in the heart of the secularist will be filled by Communist propaganda. Nothing could be more disastrous than to under-estimate the menace of Communist propaganda, but, to be truthful, the generation met with in Church House and Padre's Hour seems as yet to be singularly free from ideologies of any marked kind. Time may not be on our side, but at least there still is time. Our chief danger is not to be identified with any contemporary "ism". The fault lies clearly in ourselves. How little fitted is the Christian Community to take this chance! In the first place, and this is its gravest weakness, it fails to be a community in any real sense of the word. One of the commonest questions still put to the Padre concerns the divided state of Christendom. Any answer which excludes an honest confession of Sin, one's own sin and the sin of one's own denomination, is patently un-Christian. The tragedy is that its "un-Christianness" is more readily preceived by those without than those within

the Church. In this connection the claim put forward for a strictly denominational treatment of the Padre's Hour deserves some scrutiny. It is true that the only Christian allegiance we can offer to men is a partial, denominational allegiance. To join no regiment at all means in effect to remain outside the Army. A disembodied Christianity is unreal, and the challenge must always be, not just to accept some theory of the Universe or conception of God, but to join up in a movement, to come within a fellowship, to become a full member in one or other of the Churches. There is no avoiding this conclusion, no arguing with the contention that Churchless Christianity is not Christianity at all. Those who see this most clearly, however, do not always see the no less real danger that in so stoutly championing our divisions we are in fact perpetuating them, and indeed imprinting them for the first time on the consciousness of many of our converts. The case of the mission field springs to mind. Comparisons between the mission field abroad and the mission field at home are bound to be misleading, but there are some analogies to be drawn which are uncomfortably close. An undenominational Christianity is not a real option, but a purely denominational appeal, neither made in penitence nor informed by a true catholicity, is no less unfortunate.

The Need of Men—and of Women

The shortage of Chaplains is a real difficulty. The Church of England could use at least seventy more than its present complement, and is allowed to appoint that number if suitable men can be found. Numbers are not, of course, everything. This is not an easy job. Missionary gifts of rare quality are called for. A certain maturity and experience of life, both inside and outside the parish, are essential. It is no less essential that chaplains should remain, in fullest status, ministers in their own communions with all that that implies. Most of those Chaplains who presently serve in the Army do so on a short-term basis, three to five years

being the normal period of engagement. They serve alongside a nucleus of long-term permanent Chaplains who spend on an average twenty years in the Department. The advantages of such continuous service are clearly very real, but it is certain that regular transfusions of new blood, in the persons of Chaplains who are seconded for such work for a year or two, are a real strength to the whole witness of the Church in the Army.

We must not think only in terms of men. The need is no less urgent for Chaplain's Assistants, as the women are called who minister to the W.R.A.C. and the W.R.A.F. There are fourteen of these women to-day; eight of them in the Army. Of these eight, one is serving in Germany and one in the Middle East. Their work is not as widely known as it deserves to be. Wearing their own distinctive uniform, their lives are spent with the women to whom they minister, befriending, visiting, counselling, teaching, leading in worship. Such a form of service calls for very special gifts. Perhaps some woman reader may feel a call to this exacting and rewarding ministry. Miss Bridget Hill (c/o The Chaplain-General, The War Office) is Secretary of the interdenominational committee responsible for the work and can supply fuller information.

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Perhaps enough has been said to indicate that the Church in the Army, accorded a status no longer known in civilian life, is not inclined to rest on its oars. Christians in the Army are, as elsewhere, very much a minority, but they are striving to become a "creative minority". The Chaplain has contact with his parishioners in a way impossible to the civilian clergy. New techniques of evangelism in Padre's Hour and Church House, with all the difficulties they involve, yet serve in some real measure to "Christianize" the army. It is certain that the opportunities presented to the Church in the Army to-day are greater than they have ever been before, and greater probably than they are elsewhere. It is

no less certain that the Church as a whole is slow to recognize this, and takes but halting steps towards the open door. The Army, no less than the world, is too strong for a divided Church; and, indeed, in time of stress, is apt to develop a degree of fellowship which puts our so-called Christian fellowship to open shame. Additional Chaplains are urgently required, and it might not be misleading to frame an appeal for them in this way:

“*WANTED*: For a job as full of promise as of difficulty, Churchmen who are penitent, ‘catholic’, human, and very hard-working.”

J. FRASER McLUSKEY.

CHRISTIANS AND MYSTICS

DR. DALBY’S excellent little book on Christian mysticism¹ fulfils two purposes. It is a good small-scale introduction to the message of some of the important Christian mystics. It also presents an argument, drawn from the writings themselves, to prove that, contrary to common opinion, the mystics often do value the natural world; they do not regard it as unconditionally the enemy of that immediate kind of knowledge of God which the mystic insight gives. The main object of this work is to show that the renouncing of the world, and of the images, concepts and discourse by which we live with it—this renunciation means penetrating through its entanglements and false hold upon us, to a position where it is no longer fought as a hindrance but affirmed as a God-given reality. Nature, then, is the basis from which the spiritual quest begins and to it the adept in mystical enlightenment often returns with a disinterested love deepened by detachment.

¹ *Christian Mysticism and the Natural World*. By Joseph Dalby, D.D. (James Clarke, 7s. 6d.).

But is not the claim to reach such a position one of great pretension to which a Christian, knowing his dependence upon the grace of God, could not aspire without pride? This criticism of the mystics has been made by modern teachers like Brunner and Niebuhr, who fasten upon the close link between the mystic and neo-platonic outlook and this seems to them nearer to pagan gnosis than to the gospel's offer of salvation for man's inner contradictions. On the other side we have Dr. Inge and Nicolas Berdyaev writing as if mystical union were practically the very essence of Christianity. What then are we to say to the question of the relation of mysticism to Christian faith? We may be impressed by the ease with which mystical writers seem to cut through all the historical, concrete and "particularist" problems to which the Christian gospel ministers—and so put down mysticism as a snare to the believer. But then we cannot ignore how much the Christian mystics have contributed to a deepened understanding of Christian truth and the large extent to which their findings have influenced the development of theology.

Dr. Dalby deals effectively with some of the objections to mysticism in his introductory chapter, though he has not put quite bluntly what, in my view, needs to be said. This can be put in three statements: there is a truly Christian mysticism; there is a good deal of mysticism that is not Christian; and there is much good Christianity that is not mystical at all. These statements mean that Christian mysticism is a valid expression of Christian truth and some Christian insights cannot otherwise be reached, but it represents a Christian grappling with levels of reality which adherents of other religions and some off-centre Christian sects have also probed. And Christian people need not become mystics in order to appropriate the full resources of their faith. In this matter I find Dr. Dalby's two chapters "Mysticism, Grace and Nature" and "The Necessity of the Supernatural" somewhat unsatisfactory. They make their points, that grace and nature are not antithetical, and

that supernatural grace is necessary to preserve nature in man from perversions. But grace and the supernatural acts of God are not to be identified with mystical gifts, as they tend to be in these chapters. There is a difference of opinion among authorities as to the proper description of mystical prayer. Some, like Albert Farges (*The Ordinary Ways of the spiritual Life*) put it down under the passive reception of supernatural gifts—but even they do not confine these gifts to mystical experience. And grace is a known blessing to countless non-mystical folk.

All the great religious traditions of the world assert the possibility of a certain finding of God in the depths of the soul and this, says Christopher Dawson (*Religion and Culture*, n. ii) is part of natural religion; it is not a leap from knowledge to faith but a specialized kind of natural knowledge. Faith comes when that ground or "the centre, the end or the bottom of the soul", as William Law calls it, is known as the meeting place with Him who speaks by His redeeming acts in the Bible, in Christ and in the Church. Therefore the mystics' experience which penetrates to this level had better not be called supernatural—it is certainly not to be equated with grace. Dom John Chapman (*Spiritual Letters*, p. 269 and Appendix II) prefers to call it preternatural. "The preternatural faculty and act are not necessarily vehicles of the supernatural to us nor informed by charity, any more than they are so to the souls in hell or to the devils. But God can make them the vehicle of supernatural communications, in fact a means of grace." If Dr. Dalby had taken his stand in this interpretation he would have strengthened his case and avoided serious theological confusion between mystic insight, supernatural gifts and the grace of God.

In fact, the greater part of his book discerningly describes the Christian mystics as men and women who checked their mystical findings by the New Testament and the costly ways of the Christian life, such as the great Ruysbroek and the other Julian of Norwich whom Dr. Dalby interprets at

some length. He gives a passage from Mother Julian which we may say, is an epitome of his whole work but we should notice that it retains its message apart from any connection with mysticism. "For nature is all good and fair in itself and grace was sent out to save nature and destroy sin, and bring again fair nature to the blessed point from whence it came, that is God; with more nobleness and worship by the virtuous working of grace". This is quoted in Dr. Dalby's excellent chapter on "The Medieval English Mystics" which also deals with Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and the Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

The place of symbolism in mystical writings is examined and this is the occasion of a useful few pages on Thomas Traherne and Richard Jefferies. (But can one rightly regard Traherne as a nature-mystic?) The author has illuminating and practical things to say about the need for a measure of asceticism in every Christian life and its part in the mystical way. He touches briefly upon the meaning of the *negativa* to God by detachment and mortification, both of the senses and of the more *felt* movements of religious experience. He tells us something of the "Dark Night" of the soul and of the spirit, which seems like the loss of God but which is an unavoidable stage to be passed through before a deeper union is found; this enterprise is to be clearly distinguished from a passive quietism. In all this and in his treatment of "The Goodness of the Natural" world Dr. Dalby leans heavily upon St. John of the Cross who, as the mystics' "mystic" is made to bear testimony to the truth that in the mystical union with God the soul arrives at a true knowledge and love of the creatures.

At a time when Christians are perforce pressed to interpret their faith in the light of world-shaking events and are largely using it as a professed solution of immediate problems, it is a satisfaction to commend a book which reminds us that:

"It is difficult to see how the Christian community itself could perform its office of a divine preservative and co-

continued guarantor of the true natural life of the whole society without the presence within it of a nucleus of contemplative souls, an inner cell of spiritual vitality and energy."

[There are many serious misprints, e.g. p. 45, l. 22, "to" for "of"; p. 46, l. 32 "medical" for "medieval"; p. 49, l. 11, "for" for "of"; p. 62 has no footnote to the reference to Watkin which is wrongly numbered.]

V. A. DEMANT.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

THE CIVIL SERVICE

Dear Sirs,

May I be permitted to add my humble contribution to the discussion on the Civil Service, as a member of the public, who, like most citizens of the Welfare State, has to have frequent contact with the lowest level of Civil Servant, the reception clerk. Most of my dealings are with the Ministries of Pensions and Labour, which, perhaps, have to encounter more problems requiring personal consideration, than others, like the Ministries of Food and Fuel and Power.

It seems as if the situation has so far been discussed only as it operates at higher levels (this is, perhaps, an element in the Frontier approach in general, which makes some of its discussions seem a little out of perspective and not directly relevant to the experience of ordinary people). The situation, as it appears at the lowest level, suggests that there are more dangers and defects in the system, and, therefore, more difficulties in the way of the Christian Civil Servant at this level in expressing his faith in his work, than some of the writers have allowed. Experience "on the other side of the counter" suggests that the size of the organization is a highly relevant factor. An increasing number of reception clerks seem to be having to deal with an increasing number of inquirers. Under these circumstances the system seems to impose on them the duty of reducing the scope and content of the inquiries to the minimum, and then of protecting their superiors by allowing as few of the cases as possible to be admitted to higher level. On the public's side, this means frustration for many

ordinary people, who do not have the time or the necessary insight into the machinery to know how to set about forcing these problems to a higher level. On the Civil Servants' side, it means that more people than ever, for the most part endowed with limited gifts of personality and experience of power, are saddled with the inevitable duty of being the last line of protection against their already overburdened superiors and are, therefore, equipped with the most responsible form of power that can be exercised, that of life and death decision over the human situations which appear before them. This is the main end of the system, which seems open to personal encounter and responsibility. This is the main point at which the personal pressures and tensions seem to be felt. Is it right that the duty of exercising such power should rest on the shoulders of ordinary people "on one side of the counter", and be allowed to govern the destinies of ordinary people on the other? What a problem it is for these people on both sides to express their Christian faith in their respective situations!

A. D. ST. J. HURST.

Dear Sirs,

You will hardly wish me to pursue the correspondence on this subject which has arisen, in part, from my letter in your issue of December, 1950. I may, however, be permitted to point out that I certainly do not want, any more than Mr. Symons does, to shoot the dog which was the subject of discussion. I too suggested merely that it should be watched. As regards Mr. Ross's and Mr. Heron's letters I will only say that, if I differ from them, it is not through having lacked opportunities to observe the facts. The difference is in the matter of interpretation, and the pursuit of that would take us all very far—I think in the direction of mutual understanding.

C. H. SISSON.

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